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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Date: December 10, 1969

SUBJECT: Dominican Involvement in Terror

PARTICIPANTS: Frei Edson Maria Braga, Superior of Dominican Monastery in São Paulo

John D. Blacken, Political Officer, American Consulate General, São Paulo

PLACE: Dominican Monastery, Perdizes District, São Paulo

SUMMARY:

Frei Edson said seven Dominican seminarians had been arrested in connection with the Marighela terrorist group but they were not "terrorists," nor was the Perdizes' monastery a command or message center of the terrorists as the police and some newspapers had charged. The authorities were trying to demoralize the Dominicans and the Church. The Dominicans order was opposed to violence but would continue its advocacy of social and economic justice and reforms.

Introduction

The reporting officer has known Frei Edson for approximately two years and has conversed with him at length several times during this period. Frei Edson welcomes contacts with Congea officers and has always talked freely about his attitudes and those of the Dominicans. Last December, for example, he told us that with the adoption of the Fifth Institutional Act, the Government and the Church had entered into a period of "active conflict" and that clergymen would be involved in activities which would result in their being jailed. Frei Edson is a very "intense" man who is emotional by nature but who exercises much self-control so that during conversations concerning the military and police only his eyes betray his anger and the

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turbulence within him. He effectively entered Church life at the age of seven when he started school and has never left this milieu. As a result of his lack of practical experience in public affairs, he is naive concerning aspects of the political process. He sees injustice, poverty and misery and believes everyone should work directly to remedy these evils. His description of the involvement of the Dominicans with the Marighela terrorist group and Marighela's death follows:

1. Nature and Extent of Individual Involvement

Seven seminarians, not ordained priests, had been arrested and charged with being terrorists. The Dominicans recognized their association with these young men, although one of them had separated from the Order and had been studying at the University of Sao Paulo during the past year.

They were young and immature. Moreover, they were not terrorists; they had become involved in giving sanctuary, but were not part of the organization.

2. Monastery Not Command Center

The reports police had given to newspapers--that the Dominican Monastery was a place where meetings were held and that it was a message center where elements of Marighela's group received orders--were completely false. The Monastery had not been used for these purposes. The police had never searched the monastery. They had entered one night and arrested one seminarian who was sleeping there. They had left behind several policemen who observed all visitors for several days. No ordained priests had been arrested although the former Provincial of the Order of the Dominicans, Francisco CATAO, had been detained and questioned (Catão left the priesthood last year and is currently working for ASPLAN).

3. Betrayal Denied

The arrested Dominican seminarians had not betrayed Carlos Marighela. The trap had been set without their participation. The betrayal had been arranged by the "police" woman who was killed by the police during the gun battle. Allegedly she had been Marighela's mistress.

4. Attempts to Demoralize Dominicans and Church

The authorities had exaggerated involvement of the seminarians with the terrorist organization and had made it appear that ordained priests were involved. The newspaper O Estado de São Paulo, which had always opposed the social action and "conscientization" activities of the Dominicans and other progressive clergymen, seized on the incident to use as a weapon against them. By innuendo, O Estado articles had made out the Dominicans to be terrorists and traitors to Marighela. Why had they not given the same publicity to the fact that bank employees, doctors, architects and even army officers had become involved with terrorist groups?

5. Impact on Dominicans

While the initial impact had been adverse, the subsequent arrests of clergymen and nuns in Ribeirão Preto and elsewhere, and the stories of torturing and humiliating nuns by the authorities had caused greater unity in the Church than had heretofore existed. Opposition to the military regime had solidified. The progressives were no longer alone. Conservatives, such as the Cardinal Archbishop Dom Vicente Scherer of Porto Alegre, were now openly questioning the regime.

6. Dominicans Oppose Violence

Frei Edson said that he and other Dominican priests opposed the use of violence by either the Government or by terrorist groups. The principal blame, however, must rest with the Government which initiated the process by disobeying its own laws. It had issued the Constitution of 1967 and had failed to abide by it. The police and military had systematically ignored not only the Constitution, but also the basic rights to which all human beings have a right.

It was not surprising that radical groups such as Marighela's could recruit young people into their ranks. The authorities were perpetuating physical violence daily through arbitrary arrests and tortures against a much greater number of people than were harmed by the terrorists.

7. The Future

The Dominicans would not let these unfortunate events affect their activities. They would continue to urge people to work for social and economic reforms and denounce injustice wherever they found it.

8. COMMENT

Frei Edson appeared thoroughly convinced that the arrested seminarians were not "terrorists." He appeared to base his reasoning on the fact that to be a "terrorist" an individual would have to participate actively in violent action. The fact that the seminarians provided asylum and otherwise cooperated with the Marighela group did not apparently, in his mind, signify that they were members of the group. Frei Edson's rationale appears naive, but absolutely sincere. The determination he attributed to Dominicans to continue their "conscientization" activities and work for social change makes probable future friction with the GOB's security authorities.